



## **Advice for Victims of Sexual Assault**



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## **Helping victims of sexual assault**

If you or someone you know has been seriously sexually assaulted or sexually abused, this booklet is for you. It explains what the police and others will do to help you, and what will happen.

It is important that you report your assault to us so that we can try to find your attacker, and perhaps prevent someone else from being attacked. But only you can decide whether you want to do that. If you do, we will give you all the support and help we can.

If you want to, you can take a relative or friend along with you when you go to the police. People often find that helps them.

The police will need to talk to you about the assault and a doctor will examine you. Both will be concerned about you and will try to explain things in a way you will understand.

If, at any time at all, you do not understand what is happening, please ask.

Sexual assault and sexual abuse are serious crimes. They can also be violent crimes. We want to find who was responsible for attacking you. We also want to help you as much as we can.

## Our promise to you

Whether you are male or female, if you are the victim of a serious sexual assault, we will:

- be kind, sensitive and courteous
- speak to you in a way you can understand
- make you as comfortable as possible
- appoint an experienced detective who will do everything possible to catch your attacker
- whenever possible, give you the choice of being examined by a female or a male doctor
- tell you, with as much warning as possible, if you have to appear in court. We will also tell you if your court date is changed



- try to make sure, before a defendant is sentenced, that the court is aware of the impact of the offence on you, your family and your life
- talk to your employer if you want us to
- whenever possible, give you back your property that was kept as evidence, if you want it
- appoint a male or female police officer, whichever you prefer, to 'chaperone' you. He or she will be sympathetic, discreet and tactful and will:
  - tell you, as far as possible, what is happening, and what will happen next
  - contact a support group for you, if that is what you want
  - make a hospital appointment for you, if you want one.

We will also pass on to you information we receive from the Crown Prosecution Service:

- about developments in your case
- when someone is to be prosecuted
- or, whether the person accused of assaulting you is to be released on bail and if any bail conditions apply. For example, that might be that the accused person must not contact you, or go to certain places.

## The role of the police

The main role of the police is to investigate the attack on you.

It is the responsibility of the Crown Prosecution Service to prosecute the person who is charged with attacking you.

The legal process can be long and complicated, but your determination to see it through might reduce the chance that someone else will be assaulted by the same person.

We have special examination suites with a comfortable sitting room, a medical examination room, and a bathroom where you can have a bath or a shower after the medical examination. A fresh change of clothes and personal items such as combs, toothbrushes, shampoo, talcum powder, facecloths and bath towels, are available.

When you are talking about the attack with the police, either with the detective who will investigate your case or the officer who will initially support you, please ask questions about any words or procedures that are not clear to you.

It is important to write down the names and phone numbers of everyone who is working with you so you can call them if you have further questions. There is space at the back of this booklet to do this.

## Reporting the assault

The sooner you report the assault to the police, the more likely we are to find the person who assaulted you. But reporting an assault does not necessarily mean you have to go to court.

The first thing you may want to do after the assault is to wash or change your clothes, and that is very natural. But it will help us to find your attacker if you contact the police first. You may not realise it, but you might destroy valuable evidence by washing or changing.

However, it is still important to tell the police even if you have washed or changed, and it will still help if you can give us the clothes you were wearing at the time you were attacked.

It is also important that you do not take anything away from where the attack happened, and try not to touch anything.

The police officer who first comes to your aid will want to know brief details of the assault:

- when and where it took place
- your name, age, and address
- a description of the person who assaulted you – this might be passed on to police officers who are on patrol.

Before a doctor examines you, a specially trained female or male police officer, whichever you prefer, will ask you for details about the attack.

It may be unpleasant or embarrassing for you to talk about it, but it is important that you give as much detail as you can. You may also meet the senior officer in charge of investigating your case.

The police officers will understand how you are feeling, and they will be sympathetic.

## Being examined by a doctor

After you report the assault to the police, we will ask you to agree to be examined by a doctor who has been specially trained to examine people who have been assaulted.

The purpose of the examination is to make sure that you get any medical help you need, and also to look for evidence.

Wherever possible, you will be offered the choice of a female or male doctor, and you will be examined at one of our special victim examination suites. These suites are situated throughout London and offer both comfort and privacy.

Very occasionally, the examination may need

to take place at the doctor's own surgery.

The doctor will take care of any injuries you have and may arrange for you to be treated at a local hospital.

The doctor may also want to take small samples from intimate parts of your body – vagina, rectum or mouth. The samples are collected for evidence and might help to identify the attacker. They may contain small traces from the attacker, such as semen, hair, skin, or fibres.

The clothes you were wearing at the time of the assault may be sent to our laboratory to be examined, and we may need to keep them as evidence.

We may also want to take photographs of any bruises, cuts and other injuries that took place during the assault.

**Whether or not you decide to report your assault to the police, it is important that you seek medical help.**

Many hospitals have emergency departments and you can get attention at one of those. You will be asked to sign a form giving your consent to being examined and treated. You will also be asked to sign forms to allow the hospital to pass on information to the police, if you want them to.

## Helping the police with the investigation

After your medical examination, we will want a very detailed account from you about what has happened. We need this information so that a very thorough investigation can be carried out. What you say may also be needed for a court case.

This is one of the most important parts of the investigation. The questions will be very detailed and you may find them upsetting, but you must remember that we want to do all we can to find the person who attacked you.

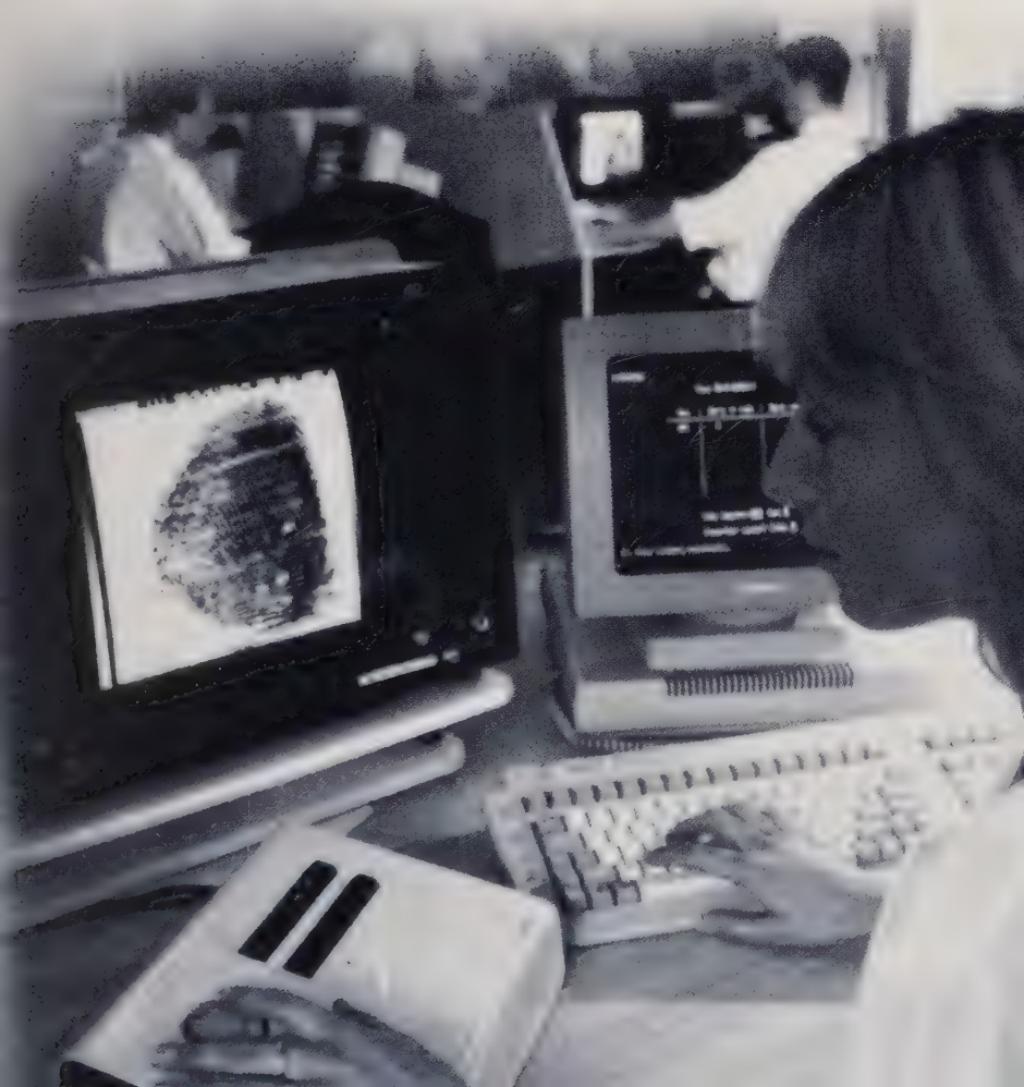
If you feel tired and need a rest, the police officers will be sympathetic and will probably suggest you rest first, before this long detailed statement is taken.

The place where the attack took place may be searched for fingerprints, stains, articles of clothing, weapons and any other evidence which will help. Please do not touch anything, or take anything away, until this has been done.

We may also want to take your fingerprints to distinguish them from other prints that are found. Your prints will be destroyed after they have been compared with any others and this will be done in your presence if you wish.

If the person who attacked you was not someone you know, we may ask you to look at photographs to see if you can identify who it was. We might also ask you to describe the person in detail so that a police artist can draw a picture of what you think the person looks like.

**Note:** If you are under 17, your evidence to the police may be recorded on video film. This will be discussed with you and the people who are looking after you.



## Identifying your attacker

We will be trying to find the person who attacked you. If someone is arrested you may be asked if you can recognise the person from a group of people. Whenever possible you will be behind a 'one way' screen and the group of people will not be able to see you. There may be eight or more in the group.

Sometimes, we will ask you to look at a video film to see if you can recognise your attacker.

## If there is a court case

In a case of sexual assault, there are two different stages in the court case.

The first stage takes place at a magistrates' court. This is called a committal hearing. You may be asked to attend, though it is more likely that your written statement about the attack will be enough and you will not have to appear in person. *At this stage, if you are under 17 you may not have to go to court.*

If the magistrates think the evidence in your case is strong enough, the case will then go to a Crown Court.

You will have to appear at the Crown Court where there will be a judge, jury, and also

barristers from the legal profession. You will be helped to go through your evidence by the prosecution barrister. Another barrister, the defence barrister, will probably ask you questions about what you have said.

There are laws which stop newspapers and television from printing your name or telling people who you are. However, they can print or tell what you actually say in court, providing it does not identify you.

If you are unsure about any of this, please ask anyone who is looking after you to explain it. We will explain this more fully if you want us to.



## How you might feel

We are all different in the way we deal with things that happen in our lives. After being sexually assaulted, some people feel very afraid for a long time afterwards. Or, they feel ashamed, anxious and angry.

For a long time you might find it difficult to sleep or eat properly, and your moods will go up and down. You might be irritable and short-tempered, and find it difficult to make decisions. You might also get very tearful at times, and it is possible that you will not feel like being close even to people you are extremely fond of.

It might help you to know that all of these feelings are usual for someone who has been through a bad experience. Other people in similar circumstances often feel exactly the same. You are not alone. It was not your fault you were assaulted.

Talking to someone who understands all of this will help you to feel better. There are counsellors who are trained to help you sort out your emotions and listen to your problems. We strongly advise you to speak to one of them.

Those who are close to you may also need some help. They may need to speak to a counsellor to help them cope with the stress, and to help them to support and comfort you.



## Your health afterwards

One of the very distressing things about sexual assault is that, if you are female, it might result in your being pregnant. The doctor who examines you after your assault will talk to you about this and, if appropriate, will offer you a pill called 'the morning after' pill.

But if, some time afterwards, your period is late, it is best for you to have a pregnancy test. Stress, tension and worry can cause you to have a late period, and this does happen sometimes to women who have been sexually assaulted, but it is best to seek medical help anyway. We will help you to arrange this if you want us to.

To both men and women the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases can also be a worry if you have been sexually assaulted. It is important for you to have a series of checks at a special clinic. You should have the first of these within a few days after the assault. Some London hospitals have special facilities for sexual assault victims. The police officer supporting you will have a list of them.

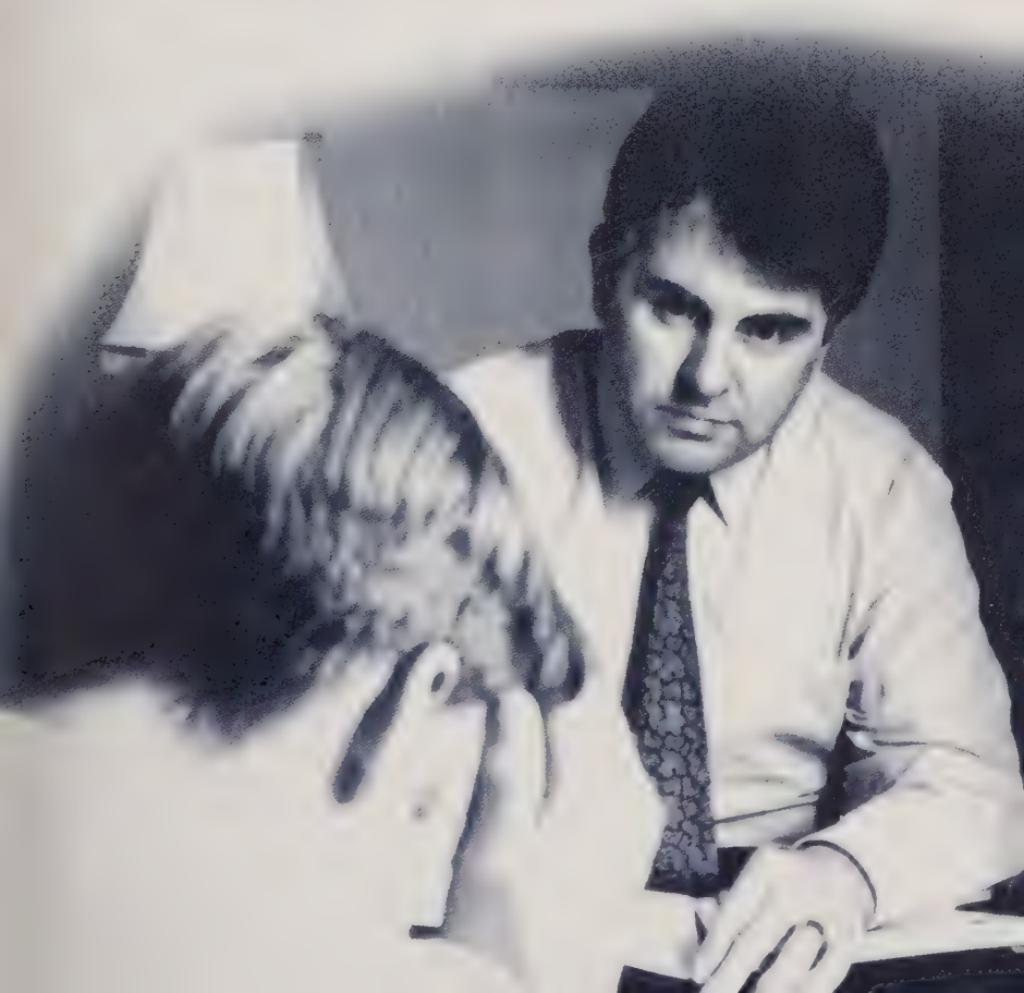
You will be asked which one you prefer to attend and the first appointment can be made for you. The police officer will offer to go with you for the first one.

## How we will support you

The Metropolitan Police Service has a number of specially trained officers whose job it is to support and help victims of sexual assault, especially in the very difficult time just after the assault has been reported.

At this time it is the job of those officers, known as 'chaperones', to

- tell you what is happening while you are being questioned or examined, and what the police are doing about your case
- put you in touch with other people with special skills who might help you.



## Victim Support

In most areas of London there is a scheme called Victim Support with trained volunteers who will:

- help you cope with your feelings about the assault
- give practical advice
- arrange visits to the police station, clinics, doctors, etc.
- tell you about support agencies in your area
- accompany you to court
- help you to apply for financial compensation to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
- give you any other help you may need.

Victim Support is a free and confidential service. If you would like the opportunity to be put in contact with one of their volunteers, your chaperone will make the necessary arrangements for you.

## **Compensation**

If you are a victim of any violent crime, and sexual assault is a violent crime, you can apply for compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

To qualify for compensation, you must have reported the incident to the police and have co-operated in the investigation.

You can get application forms from:

**The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board  
Whittington House  
19 Alfred Place  
London WC1 7LG.  
Telephone: 071-636 9501**

## Help points

You may be feeling very worried and anxious and find it difficult to remember who you have seen for help and advice.

While we are always ready to help you in any way possible, it may be useful for you to write down names and other details.

**1. The police officer investigating your case is:**

Name and rank \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ police station

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Chaperone**

PC \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

is available to help you.

Your crime reference number is:

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Support/Counselling**

Telephone number & Local Group  
\_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer worker \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Possible Tests

Pregnancy:

You are advised to contact:

Clinic \_\_\_\_\_

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

An appointment has been made for you to attend:

Clinic \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Photographs

An appointment has been made for you

at: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes





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